

FROM VILLAGE TO EMPIRE

The Romans were sure that they were safe from Hannibal. But they were wrong. The information on this page tells you how Hannibal dealt with the obstacles in his way (see Source 4 on the previous page).

The River Rhone

Hannibal first sent a small advance force of his best soldiers to cross the river secretly.

Hannibal then filled small boats and canoes with the light soldiers. The large boats were placed upstream of the light boats to protect them from the full force of the current.

Horses were towed behind the boats. One man on each side of the stern guided the horses.

As they crossed, the GAULISH tribesmen poured out of their camp — just as Hannibal had expected. But Hannibal's advance party rushed in to attack them and the tribesmen ran away.

The elephants then crossed, on huge rafts covered with earth and grass.

The Alps and the Allobrogians

Hannibal could not march along the well guarded coast road to Italy. So he took the only possible route, over the Alps, even though it was winter.

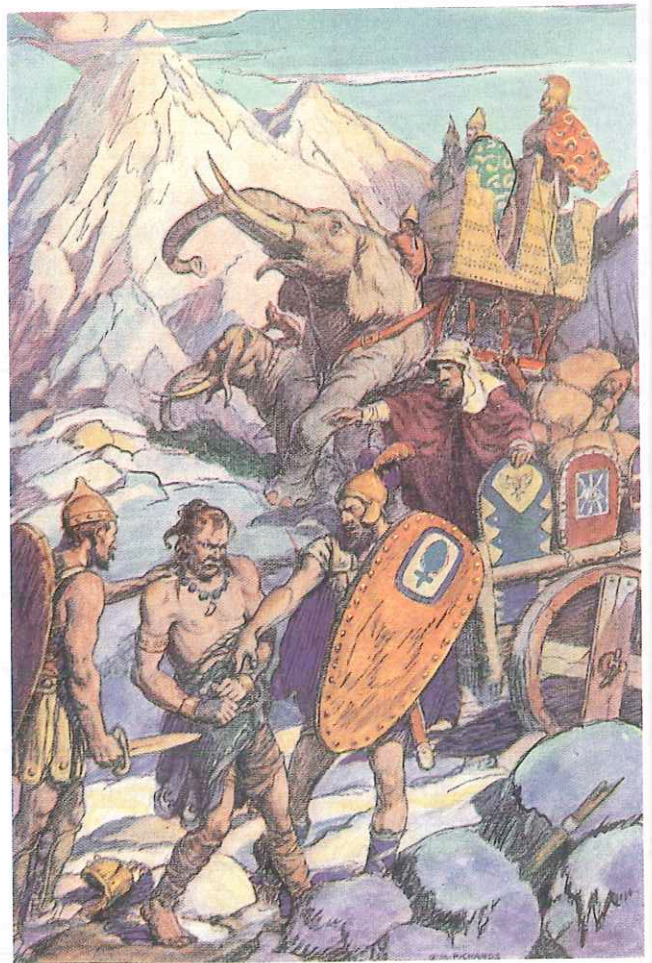
The Allobrogian tribe, who were friends of the Romans, had a large army in a strong position overlooking the Carthaginians' route down from the mountains.

Hannibal ordered the fires to be lit in his camp. He left most of his army there. He led his best soldiers to ambush the Allobrogians.

Up on the Alps the snow was already falling heavily. Hannibal saw that his men were in low spirits, because they had suffered much. To cheer them up, he called them together and pointed out Italy, which lay close beneath the mountains. The path down was very narrow and steep.

It was a treacherous path. Neither the soldiers nor the animals could tell where they were treading in the deep snow. Those that stepped wide of the path fell down the cliff to certain death.

Hannibal got his soldiers to cut a path out of the snow. After a day the path was wide enough for the packhorses and animals. It took three days to get the elephants through.



SOURCE 5 Hannibal's army crossing the Alps, drawn in the nineteenth century



SOURCE 6 Roman coin showing a war elephant

SOURCE 7 Written by the historian Polybius, about 60 years after the events

"The elephants were of great use to the Carthaginians. The enemy were too terrified of their appearance to come anywhere near them."

Look at Sources 5, 6 and 7.

1. Why was Hannibal so keen to take war elephants with him?
2. What problems did the elephants cause for Hannibal?

Hannibal had started his campaign with 100,000 soldiers; 60,000 climbed the Alps with him, but only 23,000 reached Italy. Hannibal knew his army might not be strong enough to attack Rome, and he had no siege engines. He marched south until he was within three days' march of Rome. The people of Rome were nervous, but didn't panic. They waited.

Hannibal decided against attack. Instead he continued south, looking for supplies and trying to persuade the people of other cities to join him against Rome.

Hannibal is defeated

Hannibal spent the next fifteen years in Italy. The Romans sent a number of armies to fight him, but he defeated them every time. Finally the Romans changed their tactics. Instead of fighting him, they decided to wear him down. They stopped any extra soldiers or supplies getting through to him and they refused to fight any more big battles.

Hannibal's army grew weaker with every year that passed. He had already decided that he was not strong enough to attack Rome, and few of the Italian tribes joined him. They all stayed loyal to Rome.

Meanwhile, the Roman army concentrated its efforts on attacking Carthage. After fifteen years in Italy, Hannibal was ordered home to help defend Carthage from the Romans.

Activity

You are one of Hannibal's soldiers. You have just heard that you are being called home from Italy. You are writing to your family at home in Carthage, to explain why the campaign has failed.

- a) Do you think Hannibal is a good general? Tell them how he crossed the obstacles which were in the way of the army. Did he do well?
- b) Should he have taken the elephants? Some people are grumbling that the elephants have held you up.
- c) Some people are saying he should not have climbed the Alps during the winter. What do you think?
- d) Others say he should have attacked Rome straight away. What do you think?

In 202BC, near Carthage, Hannibal was defeated by the Roman general Scipio. The Carthaginians were beaten. Their lands in southern Spain were taken by Rome. Fifty years later, the city of Carthage itself was totally destroyed, and its North African lands were also taken by Rome.

Rome was now the strongest power around the Mediterranean Sea, and her Empire grew rapidly. In the 70 years after the defeat of Hannibal, Macedonia (now south-east Europe), Greece and Asia Minor (part of modern Turkey) came under Roman rule. Egypt was under Rome's influence.

Some countries that the Romans conquered became PROVINCES. New Roman towns called COLONIES were established. Other neighbouring countries became allies. The defeat of Carthage meant that Rome was the master of the whole Mediterranean area. But as we shall see, the Romans still found it difficult to control all these lands.

1. Historians see Hannibal's defeat as a major turning point in Rome's history. How did the defeat of Hannibal change things for Rome?